BIOGRAPHY

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# THOMAS BENTLEY

## PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS

BY R. R. JAMES

MUNK thought that Thomas Bentley must have died between the years 1531 and 1541, because his death is not recorded in the college annals and the records for those ten years are defective. He notes the fact that he was thrice president of the College and that his name is not in the list of elects for 1541, but he omits to state that Bentley was physician to Henry VIII. and to Edward VI.

I am in a position to supplement Munk's brief account of Bentley. It is almost certain that he was a member of a Warwickshire family branches of which owned property at Kineton and Stratford upon Avon; but he was probably a son of Geoffrey Bentley, of Woodstock, and was born c. 1485. After taking his M.D. Oxon., in 1518, he was physician to the Duke of Buckingham. The latter was executed in 1521, but his physician does not appear to have been accused of participation in the high treason for which Buckingham suffered.

He was at Oxford at the time, for I find that on April 20th, 1521, he received an acquittance for property given to the University of Oxford by John Thorne, late Abbot of Reading. He was for a time Fellow of New College. His wife's surname is unknown, but her christian name was Anne. While in Oxford they lived in one of the George Halls, possibly in St. Mary's parish. In the same year (1521) Dr. Bentley, physician of Oxford, was sent for to Court. On the death of Linacre, in 1524, Bentley was appointed physician to Henry VIII. He resided in St. Botolph Without in "Alrichgate" (Aldersgate). In 1528 he was the recipient of a New Year's gift from the King. Previously, in 1525, the Canons of Holy Trinity let the demesne lands of the rectorial manor of Tottenham, with the great tithes, to Bentley for 40 years. Lee, Archbishop of York, in 1533, recommended him for the manor of Stockwell, saying that "he is an old friend of mine and a right honest

man." At about this time he was unfortunate in having his house burgled by a woman named Margaret Maxeborne ; and the odd thing is that the lady in question received a Royal pardon, dated at Greenwich, in May, 1533.

Bentley received a salary of £10 a quarter from 1528 to 1547 and his servant had a New Year's gift from the King in 1538 and 1540. On Jan. 10th, 1544–45 he let his property in Oxford, by charter, to Harman Evans, bookseller. It must have been at about this time that Bentley retired to Stratford upon Avon, for he certainly added to his property there in 1546. He rented, from Squire Clopton, the Great House for 40 years. This house was later known as New Place and was the residence of William Shakespeare.

Bentley died, probably early in 1549 and was buried in the church at Stratford upon Avon. The following is an abstract of his will.

(P.C.C. Cood, 6). 26 Jan., 1548. Thomas Bentley, of Stratford upon Avon, Co. Warwick. Dr. of Physick to the late King Henry VIII. Soul to God. Body in the parisshe churche of Stratford. To wyfe Anne my best standinge cuppe of sylver and gylte wt the couer, a neste of goblettes of syluer & gylte wt the couer, my beste salte wt his couer, syx pottes of syluer & gylte wt their couers and all my syluer spones, wt all my fuelles and all my right tytle and interest and terme of yeres that I have of and in my house in Oxford called George Hall together wt the indenture of the same house wt certeyn ymplementes therein remaynynge as Standerth, whiche house is now in the tenure of Harman Evans. Item I bequeath to my sonne William Bentley my seconde beste standynge cuppe of syluer and gylte wt the couer and a potte of syluer and gylte wt the couer. I bequeath to Anne Bentley my daughter my seconde beste syluer salte wt his couer, thre pottes of syluer and gylte wt their couers and a kowe orelles XXs. in money. To my daughter Dorothe Bentley my thirde salte of syluer and gylte wt his couer, a kowe and a calfe orelles XXs. in money. To Robert Wyncocke a syluer cuppe wt the couer. To William Clerke, whome I have brought upp of charitie, twoo heyfers when married. Residue to wife Anne, my sole executrix. Friends Thos. Blount [1] and Robt. Wyncocke, supervisors. The said Thomas to have a syluer potte for his pains. Wit. John Jeffries, Thos. Waturman, Laurence Seyton, Wm. Myns. Proved at London, 4 March, 1549.

Bentley's widow is said to have married a certain Richard Charnock. His son William married Anne

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Porter and died in Shropshire in 1547. Of his daughters, Anne married William Botterell,[2] of Aston Botterell, Salop, after her father's death. Dorothy was married, after her father's death to Roger Gifford, of Hillesden, Bucks; while Barbara, who is not mentioned in the will, married Thomas Raynsford, of Little Compton, Glos.

I am indebted to Mr. Harvey Bloom for the transcript of the will and to Mr. Frederick Wellstood, F.R.Hist.Soc., Librarian of Shakespeare's Birthplace for the loan of a privately printed brochure from which most of the above facts are abstracted.

The monotonous repetition of silver salts, cups, &c., with covers shows that Bentley must have made good the depredations of the burglar.

FOOTNOTES

1. Thomas Blount may be a scion of the ancient Shropshire family of Blount, of Kinlet and Mawley Hall, though his exact relationship to Sir George Blount, whose monument in Kinlet Church is one of the finest Elizabethan monuments in the country, is not clear to me. He was possibly Thomas Blount, of Kidderminster, grandson of Sir John Blount, of Kinlet, who died in 1524. If so he was a cousin of Sir George.

2. The Botterell family at Aston date from A.D. 1200. I know the place well as I was born and bred in the next parish a mile away. Like Hardy's D'Urbervilles the family fell on evil times and I think I am correct in stating that the last direct descendant died in very reduced circumstances about the middle of last century.

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